

# The Differential Empowering Effects of Europeanization on the Autonomy of National Agencies

TOBIAS BACH,\* EVA RUFFING,\*\* and KUTSAL YESILKAGIT\*\*\*

*This article examines the influence of Europeanization on the relationship between ministries and agencies at the national level. The core argument is that the differentiated nature of the international environment (with policy development often transferred to the international level and policy implementation left at the national level) transforms national agencies into policy-developing actors that shape policies without being directly influenced by their national political principals. The increasingly common involvement of national agencies in European policymaking processes thereby increases these agencies' policy-development autonomy but does not change their role in policy implementation. We examine this argument by testing an innovative hypothesis—the differentiation hypothesis—on a combined data set of German and Dutch national agencies. Our empirical findings support the hypothesis in both countries, suggesting that similar effects can be expected in other contexts in which semiautonomous agencies are involved in transnational policymaking.*

## Introduction

The ongoing process of European integration has resulted in a differentiation of the policy process: Whereas policymaking is being increasingly transferred to the European level to address cross-border policy problems, such as the regulation of financial markets and the promotion of trans-European energy grids, the implementation of these policies, in the strict sense of the term, remains within the competence of the member states and their administrative systems (Hofmann and Türk 2007; Versluis 2008). However, the character of these administrative systems has also changed. In the past 20 years, the proliferation of semiautonomous agencies at arm's length from elected politicians has fundamentally transformed national modes of governance (Christensen and Lægreid 2003; Pierre and Peters 2000; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Verhoest et al. 2010). Whereas delegation to semiautonomous agencies has been furthered for efficiency gains and reasons of credible commitment to long-term policy

\*Hertie School of Governance, Berlin

\*\*University of Hannover

\*\*\*Utrecht University School of Governance

goals, it also leads to the fragmentation of the administrative system, which goes hand in hand with problems of political control, accountability, and policy coordination (Bogdanor 2006; Christensen and Lægreid 2007). European integration and agencification have together enabled national agencies to play a pivotal role in transnational administrative networks, allowing them to handle cross-border policy problems (Eberlein and Newman 2008) since they possess the expertise and technological skills to address these often wicked problems. Hence, the emergence of transnational administrative networks has opened up institutional playing fields outside the boundaries of the national state (Raustiala 2002; Slaughter 2004).

A number of recent empirical studies indicate that national agencies' participation in transnational networks challenges entrenched national actor constellations by empowering the agencies vis-à-vis their parent ministries (Bach and Ruffing 2013; Danielsen and Yesilkagit 2013; Egeberg 2006; Newman 2008; Yesilkagit 2011). This article argues that the differentiated nature of the European Union (EU) policy process, in which policy development is transferred to the European level and policy implementation is left at the national level, has a differentiated effect on the relationship between national agencies that participate in EU decision making and their parent ministries. To explore this effect, we use a multidimensional concept of agency autonomy, differentiating between autonomy in the phase of policy development and autonomy in the phase of policy implementation (Niklasson and Pierre 2012; Painter and Yee 2011). The *differentiation hypothesis* proposed in this article suggests that Europeanization (i.e., agency participation in EU networks) strengthens national agencies' position in national policymaking, that is, their policy-development autonomy, rather than their autonomy in policy implementation. The main theoretical explanation is that EU networking provides national agencies with both expert and negotiation knowledge in a multilevel decision process, which is relevant for policy development, but hardly affects ministry-agency relations in policy implementation. Additionally, the direct involvement in supranational policymaking processes is assumed to produce spillover effects on the agencies' role in the domestic setting. In contrast, we argue that the implementation of EU policies by national agencies is little different from the implementation of national policies, in which agencies are characterized by generally high degrees of autonomy (Verhoest et al. 2010).

To make the differentiation argument more robust, we propose a *context hypothesis*, according to which we also expect a varying effect of Europeanization across different national contexts. Following the organizational perspective deployed by Morten Egeberg and his associates (Egeberg and Trondal 2009a), we argue that certain structural characteristics—that is, the existence of semiautonomous agencies at the national level and their involvement in differentiated European policy processes—will yield similar results, regardless of the national context in

which these agencies are rooted. This argument must be tested against the concurring approach that different patterns of agency reforms might have a moderating effect on the relationship between Europeanization and agency autonomy. For example, New Public Management (NPM)–inspired agencification might have triggered a more substantial demand for autonomy by the agencies, especially in terms of policy implementation. To ensure a conclusive test for our context hypothesis, we chose two countries that are founding members of the EU and share broadly similar administrative traditions (Painter and Peters 2010) but differ with respect to the variable under consideration (i.e., patterns of agency reforms), namely, Germany and the Netherlands. Whereas the Netherlands has pursued a deliberate policy of hiving off agencies out of ministries since the 1990s (Yesilkagit and van Thiel 2008), Germany has a long tradition of semiautonomous agencies (Bach and Jann 2010).

The empirical data are drawn from an international survey database of public sector agencies, allowing us to include a number of control variables in the statistical models. The empirical results support the theoretical assumptions concerning a differentiated and robust effect of Europeanization on agency autonomy: In both countries, Europeanization has a statistically significant effect on the policy-development autonomy of national agencies but not on their policy-implementation autonomy, thereby changing the traditional roles of agencies in the policy process.

This article contributes to three broad streams of discussion: First, we contribute to the discussion on agency autonomy in the national context, which has hitherto not systematically considered transnationalization as an explanatory variable (see, however, Pollitt 2006). Second, we discuss Europeanization and European networks. In comparison to prevailing studies, we do not confine ourselves to network effects alone but also look at the estimated effects of agency participation in, for example, Council of Ministers or Comitology Committees. Another distinguishing feature of this article is that we do not estimate the effects of Europeanization solely on *regulatory* agencies but also on *executive* agencies. Since EU governance is leaning toward regulatory administration, many observers tend to narrow their focus to this area. Third, our results contribute to the discussion on international administrative networks in general. There is hardly any empirical work on transgovernmental networks outside the EU. The differentiation hypothesis is based on assumptions on special characteristics of policymaking and policy implementation in the EU. Since many of these characteristics are shared by other international organizations, our results could be the basis for hypothesis formulation with regard to administrative networks in the context of other international organizations.

### **The Effects of Europeanization on National Administrations**

The main theoretical question of this article is to what extent the transfer of public policy from the national to the European level in various areas

affects the relationship between politics and administration within the national state. Our main focus is hence on how core *national* polity features are affected through the process of European integration. In the diffuse discussion on Europeanization concepts, we follow approaches that conceptualize Europeanization as the proceeding of European integration (Page and Wouters 1995; Sandholtz 1996) and operationalize Europeanization as the degree to which an agency is involved at the European level. This use of Europeanization as an independent variable is in contrast to other approaches that employ Europeanization as a dependent variable that describes either the impact of European integration on policies and institutional structures or the ongoing processes of change induced by the European project (Olsen 2002; Radaelli 2003).

Although having correctly predicted that Europeanization has an empowering effect on certain institutional and sectoral actors but not on others and that it is thereby capable of changing the political game at the domestic level, the first studies that put the Europeanization effect on the academic agenda envisioned a top-down, one-directional model (Börzel and Risse 2000; Héritier, Knill, and Mingers 1996; Knill and Lenschow 1998). These studies, moreover, were far more concerned with how Europeanization affects national policymaking and policy outcomes as opposed to how Europeanization affects the machinery of government (one of the main arenas of national policymaking).

Following this first generation of Europeanization studies, several studies came to focus on national administrations. This research is quite diverse and comprises studies of changes in the structure and organization of national administrative systems (Knill 2001; Ruffing forthcoming), changes in the beliefs and role conceptions of national administrative actors (Egeberg 1999; Geuijen et al. 2008), the share and amount of time national ministries and individual civil servants devote to EU-related work (Mastenbroek and Princen 2010; Müller et al. 2010), and finally, the impact of Europeanization on national ministries and agencies across different levels of national administration and policy sectors (Egeberg and Trondal 1999; Lægrend, Steinthorsson, and Thorhallsson 2004). Like the first-generation Europeanization studies, these studies share an examination of changes in the patterns of behavior and practices within central government organizations of EU-affiliated and member states as an effect of Europeanization. Moreover, they focus on changes *within* government organizations and not specifically on changes in the relationships between national-level government organizations.

The study of Europeanization effects on *relationships* between government organizations within national administrative systems was kicked off by the work of Egeberg (2006) and his associates. Central to their work is the view that strengthening the European Commission as the EU's executive center and agencification at the national level has been fundamental to the burgeoning of a European networked order that blurs the lines between the supranational and national levels of governance. Like many

other students of European governance, these authors have shown that (European and national) agencies have become central players in almost all facets of the policy process (Coen and Thatcher 2008; Eberlein and Newman 2008). An important contribution of Egeberg and associates is that the involvement of agencies is not just a matter of “dual” or “double delegation,” that is, the formal, simultaneous empowerment of national agencies by both the Commission and national governments, but of “double hattedness”: National agencies simultaneously form part of both the administration of the EU and of (their own) national administrations (Egeberg and Trondal 2009a).

This line of research has triggered a number of empirical studies on how participation in the EU administrative order affects the national-level relationship between agencies and ministries. Abraham Newman (2008) showed that national agencies, by pooling their expertise and administrative resources via a transnational network, have been able to defy their parent ministries and the European Commission when these actors were hesitant to impose regulations on the storage and use of personal data within the EU. Kutsal Yesilkagit (2011) discovered that not only did the expertise gained through participation in an EU network increase the autonomy of national agencies, but that EU prescriptions laid down in the Privacy Directive concerning the functioning and embedding of national competent authorities within the national administrative system also enhanced the bureaucratic autonomy of the Data Protection Authority in the Netherlands. For Germany, Tobias Bach and Eva Ruffing (2013) found that the involvement of agencies in various stages of the EU policy process has a positive effect on national agencies’ policy autonomy vis-à-vis their parent ministries. Finally, studying the effects of the European Competition Network on national competition authorities in three countries, Ole Danielsen and Kutsal Yesilkagit (2013) revealed that a European network interacts differently in distinct national institutional settings, varying from a reassertion of the existing national order to a differentiation between an agency’s national (less autonomy) and international (more autonomy) activities.

### Hypotheses

Building further on these insights, this article aims to test two new hypotheses. The first is the *differentiation thesis*, which is founded upon the differentiated nature of the EU policy process and the position of national agencies therein. The EU is, in large part, a supranational political system, yet policymaking is more “supranationalized” than is policy implementation. This article conceptualizes implementation in its strict sense, encompassing only measures “transforming general policy intent into an array of rules, routines and social processes that can convert policy intention into action” (O’Toole 2007, 142) and excluding any kind of lawmaking, such as Comitology decisions (often referred to as “implementing

measures”) or transposition of European law. While policymaking competences are currently being shifted from the national to the European level in more and more policy domains, the idea that European law be implemented by the member states remains a guiding legal principle (Hofmann and Türk 2007; Versluis 2008). This principle is in line with the subsidiarity principle, which states that all competences should lie at the lowest level at which the political objectives can be efficiently achieved. Therefore, the implementation (in the sense of “putting into practice”) of EU legislation usually does not differ from the implementation of national legislation.

The EU consists of a number of varied venues, rules, and procedures for integrating national agencies into the European policymaking process. European agency networks, Commission expert committees, a host of consultation procedures, and sometimes also Council working groups allow representatives of national agencies to participate in policy advisory and policymaking processes at the EU level. In many of these processes, agency networks have a role as agenda-setters. Some of these networks also have a role in actual implementation, particularly via a “soft,” that is, nonbinding coordination of national implementation processes. Therefore, “[i]mplementation on the European level through direct administration is the exception to indirect administration by the Member States” (Hofmann and Türk 2007, 253). In other words, at the European level, national agencies engage in the making of hard law, but (with few exceptions) only in a soft coordination of implementing it at the national level. Whereas policy implementation is traditionally the task of agencies, policy development is a core task of ministries. The implementation of EU legislation by national agencies can therefore be expected to have little effect on existing patterns of ministry–agency relations.

To answer the question of what *kinds* of effects we expect, we need to develop assumptions on how Europeanization impacts the relationship between ministries and agencies. We therefore refer to the principal–agent approach, a well-established theoretical framework for analyzing ministry–agency relationships. The main issue that principals have to deal with in existing principal–agent relationships is information asymmetry inherent in any such relationship (Calvert, McCubbins, and Weingast 1989). Involvement in European networks may exacerbate the problem of information asymmetry. By becoming involved in such networks, the agency enters a new world. Its actions in these networks can be only partially monitored by the ministry by enforcing tight (and costly) reporting obligations. This means that even if the agent is not acting in bad faith, a (partial) loss of control is inevitable (Mayntz 1979) because of information asymmetry and remoteness of decision making.

Furthermore, the agency gains several types of very valuable knowledge. On the one hand, it gains privileged access to the knowledge and expertise of other network participants. On the other hand, it gains negotiation knowledge, meaning that only the actors participating directly in



the network are able to assess which positions are held by the other participants and which compromises have, in fact, been feasible. Agencies are therefore in a comfortable position to potentially influence European negotiations according to their own preferences. All in all, agencies involved in European networks might be able to “bypass” their parent ministries (Egeberg 2006) because their own influence on policymaking is not mediated by the ministry, as is usually the case in national policymaking.

From a theoretical point of view, this effect is assumed to be stronger with regard to policy-development autonomy than to implementation autonomy. In policy implementation, the discretion of a national agency cannot be widened by additional expert knowledge obtained on the European scene. However, this knowledge might affect the way an agency uses its discretion, for example, if an agency learns about best practices in other countries. Negotiation knowledge might also have a limited value because agreements regarding national implementation are usually not binding, and successful negotiation is therefore less important.

In contrast, policy development is at least partly transferred to the European level. Here, agency networks are often the hub of solution-finding and compromising. These decisions usually have to be “ratified” by other actors, for example, Comitology Committees staffed by representatives of the national ministries. Nevertheless, agency networks are influential agenda-setters. This means that negotiation knowledge becomes a valuable resource in the decision-making process. Furthermore, as far as expert knowledge is concerned, the fact that the task of policy development is also fulfilled at the European level gives the agency the chance to exploit the increasing information asymmetry by “bypassing” the ministry in the manner described above. Therefore, our hypothesis is that agencies might gain policy-development autonomy but not policy-implementation autonomy when becoming involved in European networks.

*Hypothesis 1: The involvement of national agencies in the EU policy process positively affects the policy-development autonomy of national agencies yet has no effect on policy-implementation autonomy.*

The second hypothesis focuses on the robustness of the differentiation hypothesis across politico-administrative contexts. We know from comparative studies on administrative legacies that agency reforms have sprung from “many houses” and that trajectories of agency reforms have been influenced by path dependencies (Painter and Peters 2010; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). Most importantly, some countries (e.g., Germany) have a long tradition of delegation to semiautonomous agencies, whereas others (e.g., the Netherlands) have only more recently set up executive agencies, either along the lines of modern agencies inspired by NPM or following the template of independent regulatory agencies (Bach and Jann 2010;

Verhoest et al. 2012). A number of studies point to the interaction between the operation and structure of EU networks and the national context of agencies, demonstrating that prevailing models of ministry–agency relations affect the agencies’ role in EU networks (Danielsen and Yesilkagit 2013; Egeberg 2006). However, even though these studies indicate that ministerial control patterns of agencies’ EU activities largely follow established modes of operation, they also consistently reveal an “autonomizing” effect on national agencies. This literature is in line with our structural argument that involvement in European networks opens up the possibility of bypassing parent ministries in European policymaking and makes the chain of control brittle, regardless of the national contexts these agencies are rooted in. This leads us to the context hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2: Europeanization has a differentiated effect on agency autonomy, irrespective of national agency traditions and trajectories of agency reforms.*

### Data and Methods

The empirical data for this research were gathered through standardized surveys of senior managers of national agencies in the context of the COBRA (Comparative Public Organization Data Base for Research and Analysis) research network. The German survey was conducted in 2008 among a total population of  $N = 122$  federal agencies with a response rate of 60% ( $N = 73$ ). The sample population is representative of the total population with regard to organizational type, ministry affiliation, and agency size.<sup>1</sup> The federal administration comprises two main legal types of agencies: Semiautonomous agencies have a direct hierarchical relationship with their parent ministry, whereas legally independent agencies have a more remote formal relationship with ministries that usually excludes ministerial meddling in agency decisions (see Bach and Jann 2010 for more details).

The Dutch survey was conducted in 2006 with a total population of  $N = 621$  and a response rate of 38% ( $N = 219$ ). The sample is representative of the population of national agencies with regard to organizational type.<sup>2</sup> The Dutch administrative landscape harbors four types of organizations: executive agencies, independent administrative bodies, government foundations, and public bodies with a legal personality. Executive agencies operate under the direct control of the ministry but enjoy autonomy regarding personnel and financial policies. The other types enjoy more formal autonomy from the ministry, but the legal basis on which they were founded differs among one another (i.e., public vs. private law) (see Yesilkagit and van Thiel 2008).

The questionnaires were distributed to the agency chief executives, who were asked to answer the survey on behalf of the entire organization. Although surveys of top managers are routinely used in public administration research, they potentially produce a biased picture of the



organization. Therefore, surveys covering staff at different hierarchical levels are suggested to provide a more accurate picture of different organizational views (Enticott, Boyne, and Walker 2009). However, this approach is laden with difficulties concerning how to aggregate the different views and potentially lower sample size since valid observations from all relevant organizational levels are required. Most importantly, the substantial focus of this article is on relationships with other organizations—especially parent ministries, sister agencies, and governing bodies of the EU. Hence, we assume chief executives to be the most knowledgeable respondents to assess these relationships for an entire organization.

The surveys included several items measuring different dimensions of the Europeanization of national agencies' activities (Table 1). These items were drawn from a survey of individual bureaucrats in the Netherlands (Geuijen et al. 2008; Mastenbroek and Princen 2010) that covers both a sectoral and an intergovernmental logic of national agencies' Europeanization (Bach and Ruffing 2013). The sectoral logic is measured via the participation of agency representatives in meetings arranged by the EU Commission and via the practice of informal consultations with "sister agencies" in other EU countries. The intergovernmental logic is measured by the preparation of national input for EU meetings, the transposition of EU legislation to national legislation, and the implementation of policies based on EU legislation. In the exercise of these activities agencies support their parent ministries, which usually take the lead in EU negotiations and the transposition of EU law. Moreover, the items cover the main stages of the EU policymaking process, that is, policy formulation (items 1–3 in

TABLE 1  
Europeanization of National Agencies (Two-Country Data Set)

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1. Participation in meetings arranged by the EU Commission	212	1	5	1.80	1.157
2. Informal consultations with colleagues from other EU countries	212	1	5	2.58	1.430
3. Preparation of national input for EU meetings	211	1	5	2.05	1.237
4. Transposition of EU legislation to national legislation	210	1	5	1.90	1.193
5. Implementation or monitoring of national legislation based on EU directives	210	1	5	2.38	1.463
6. Index based on (1) to (5)	209	5	25	10.67	5.349

*Note:* The following answer categories were used for the items measuring Europeanization: 1 = not at all/does not apply; 2 = to a small extent; 3 = partly; 4 = to a large extent; 5 = to a very large extent.

SD, standard deviation.

TABLE 2

**Dependent Variables**

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Implementation autonomy: choice of policy instruments (6-point scale, two-country data set)	166	0.00	1.00	0.71	0.256
Implementation autonomy: choice of target group (6-point scale, two-country data set)	177	0.00	1.00	0.67	0.262
Policy-development autonomy (5-point scale, Germany)	69	1.00	5.00	2.65	1.027
Policy-development autonomy (5-point scale, the Netherlands)	119	1.00	5.00	3.41	1.210

SD, standard deviation.

Table 1) and the transposition and implementation of EU legislation (items 4–5). For the analysis, an unweighted, additive index of Europeanization based on these five items is used ( $\alpha = 0.882$  for the two-country data set). The high internal consistency of the index indicates substantial overlap of the national agencies' exposure to different phases of EU decision making (Bach and Ruffing 2013; Mastenbroek and Princen 2010).

The descriptive statistics for the dependent variables are summarized in Table 2, which only includes cases with valid observations for the Europeanization index.<sup>3</sup> We use separate measures of policy-implementation and policy-development autonomy, thereby allowing for an empirical test of the differentiation hypothesis. We measure policy-implementation autonomy as the degree of agency discretion (i.e., the absence of ministry involvement) with regard to the choice of policy instruments and target group (e.g., setting priorities concerning which industry should be targeted by control activities). While these are merely general measures of agency discretion, they are appropriate given the heterogeneity of the survey population. Additionally, these are measures of de facto agency autonomy as perceived by the agencies' senior management. The use of perceived autonomy as a proximate measure of de facto autonomy is a widely acknowledged approach in the literature (Niklasson and Pierre 2012; Painter and Yee 2011; Verhoest et al. 2012). The assumption is that senior managers are in a very good position to make a reliable judgment on de facto agency autonomy, and that perceived levels of autonomy provide "insights about the room for manoeuvre that senior managers think they have, and hence about the actual functioning of agencies" (Verhoest et al. 2010, 47).<sup>4</sup> The analysis is performed using a joint data set including data from both countries. However, instead of using an additive index, separate models for each subdimension of policy-implementation autonomy are estimated.<sup>5</sup>

For policy-development autonomy, broadly similar measures were used in the surveys, but unfortunately, they are not directly comparable.

Therefore, we conducted separate analyses per country to study the effects of Europeanization on policy-development autonomy. This method still allows us to test the context hypothesis according to which Europeanization should affect agency policy autonomy, irrespective of national patterns of agencification. Although parliamentary systems of government are generally characterized by strong norms of separating policy formulation and implementation, agency involvement in policy formulation is fairly common. However, these activities are by and large channeled toward the parent ministries, which thereby maintain a crucial gate-keeping role in terms of agencies' policy-development autonomy (Bach 2012). For Germany, we use the degree to which agencies can make policy proposals as a measure of policy-development autonomy. This item is positively and significantly correlated with other measures of policy-development autonomy used in the German survey (see Bach 2010; Bach and Ruffing 2013 for additional measures).<sup>6</sup> For the Netherlands, we use a variable that measures the extent to which an agency is involved in developing new policies.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to our measurement of Europeanization, several control variables are included into the models. We explicitly selected control variables that are assumed to have a substantial effect on perceived agency autonomy and that have been tested empirically in similar studies (Bach 2010, 2012; Niklasson and Pierre 2012; Painter and Yee 2011; Pollitt 2006; Verhoest et al. 2010; Yesilkagit and van Thiel 2008). The control variables include the national context, formal structure, task characteristics, and cultural characteristics.

To control for context characteristics, fixed country effects are included in the policy-implementation autonomy models. According to the context hypothesis, Europeanization induces higher levels of agency autonomy, irrespective of country-specific patterns of agencification or enduring characteristics of the politico-administrative context. However, we may expect country differences regarding overall levels of agency autonomy (Pollitt 2006; Verhoest et al. 2010).

In terms of structural variables, the models take into consideration that public sector organizations may be located at different positions on a "quango continuum" characterized by varying degrees of hierarchical oversight and public financing (Flinders, van Thiel, and Greve 1999). More precisely, we distinguish between semiautonomous agencies without legal independence on the one hand and different types of legally independent organizations such as statutory bodies and foundations on the other (van Thiel 2012). In contrast to semiautonomous agencies, legally independent organizations frequently have a governing board, which is assumed to protect the agency's chief executive from political interference (Christensen 2001). Additionally, legally independent organizations are usually protected from comprehensive political oversight, which is not the case for semiautonomous agencies. Finally, we distinguish between single organizations operating on a country-wide basis and

“group organizations” performing similar tasks in a limited geographical area (Verhoest et al. 2010). National organizations may be more likely to be directly involved in EU administrative networks than group organizations.

The analysis also takes into consideration that agency task will affect the agency’s relationship with its parent ministry (Painter and Yee 2011; Pollitt 2006; Verhoest et al. 2010). First, we distinguish between regulation, other types of exercising public authority, and general public services as generic task characteristics (Verhoest et al. 2010, 94–97 for an overview).<sup>8</sup> In the literature, regulatory agencies are generally considered to have substantial discretion in terms of policy implementation, which is usually attributed to their formal independence (Verhoest et al. 2010). However, not all regulatory agencies are equally autonomous in a formal sense (Gilardi 2002), and formal autonomy alone is insufficient to explain *de facto* agency autonomy (Maggetti 2007). However, few scholars actually compare regulatory agencies with agencies that have other tasks in terms of their (perceived) *de facto* autonomy. Politicians may be more reluctant to interfere with regulatory agencies’ activities in order to convince market actors of policy stability and unbiased policy implementation (Niklasson and Pierre 2012). The second task variable (“other types of exercising public authority”) covers agencies whose activities are usually bound by detailed regulations, such as the administration of financial benefits. In the literature, these agencies are expected to have low degrees of discretion (Verhoest et al. 2010). Finally, agencies that provide “general public services” should seek high levels of discretion and “have a high interest in becoming involved in policy formulation to ensure that operational considerations are taken into account” (Bach 2012, 214). In addition to task characteristics, we control for the policy sector since the process of European integration by and large focuses on economic policy (i.e., the creation of a single market), whereas social and welfare policies are generally the domain of the member states.<sup>9</sup> Finally, we include agency budget as a control variable, which is considered a proxy for political salience (Pollitt 2006). According to large-scale empirical research, agency officials pay more attention to the preferences of the political leadership under conditions of high political salience (Egeberg and Trondal 2009b). Moreover, because of a usually high correlation between agency budget and staff numbers, budget is a useful control variable for an agency’s structural capacity to become involved in EU policymaking.

Finally, we include agency age as a control variable in terms of cultural characteristics. According to historical-institutionalist reasoning, agencies will reflect the dominant norms and values of their creation period, and these may persist under changing conditions, such as NPM reforms (Niklasson and Pierre 2012). Moreover, agencies will become infused with their own characteristic norms and values over time, which may strengthen their position vis-à-vis their parent department (Verhoest et al. 2010). Additionally, Maggetti’s (2007) findings on the determinants of

TABLE 3  
Control Variables

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Context					
Country (0 = GER, 1 = NL)	209	0	1	0.66	0.475
Structure					
Legal type (dummy)	209	0	1	0.69	0.462
Single/group organization (0 = single organization, 1 = group organization)	209	0	1	0.25	0.436
Task					
Regulation (dummy)	209	0	1	0.34	0.476
Other types of exercising public authority (dummy)	209	0	1	0.22	0.415
General public services (dummy)	209	0	1	0.57	0.496
Economic policy (COFOG)	209	0	1	0.32	0.466
Social and welfare policy (COFOG)	209	0	1	0.39	0.488
Budget	197	0.00	43,680.00	562.08	3,787.950
Culture					
Age	203	0.00	202.00	28.82	36.070

Notes: We use the standardized agency budget instead of the total agency budget to correct for the difference in size of the two countries.

SD, standard deviation.

de facto agency autonomy indicate that network membership turns out to be a significant determinant of de facto agency autonomy only in interaction with other determinants, such as the age of the agency. Table 3 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the control variables.

## Results

In order to put the differentiation hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) and the context hypothesis (Hypothesis 2) to an empirical test, we investigate the relationship between the degree of national agencies' Europeanization and their perceived autonomy with regard to policy implementation and policy development. Moreover, we test whether these relationships are robust across different national contexts. The regression analyses were performed using heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. For all dependent variables, we report the full models including all control variables, but we also estimated a baseline model (including the country dummy for cross-country analyses) as well as separate models for each set of control variables (baseline model plus structure, task, and culture variables, respectively).

### The Effects of Europeanization on National Agencies' Policy-Implementation Autonomy

Table 4 reports the regression analyses estimating the effects of Europeanization on policy-implementation autonomy. The models show that the

TABLE 4  
Policy-Implementation Autonomy (Full Models)

	Policy Instruments			Target Group		
	B	(SE)	$\beta$	B	(SE)	$\beta$
Europeanization	0.003	(0.005)	0.070	0.001	(0.004)	0.021
Country	-0.019	(0.062)	-0.035	-0.105**	(0.052)	-0.190
Legal type	0.153**	(0.069)	0.278	0.194***	(0.058)	0.342
Single/group organization	0.008	(0.054)	0.014	-0.057	(0.054)	-0.092
Regulation	0.034	(0.052)	0.064	0.016	(0.046)	0.028
Other types of exercising public authority	-0.102*	(0.056)	-0.171	-0.098*	(0.052)	-0.158
General public services	-0.033	(0.046)	-0.063	0.008	(0.045)	0.015
Economic policy	0.017	(0.058)	0.032	0.084	(0.053)	0.148
Social and welfare policy	0.030	(0.057)	0.057	0.034	(0.054)	0.064
Budget	-0.023	(0.041)	-0.102	-0.043**	(0.022)	-0.182
Age	0.001	(0.001)	0.080	0.001*	(0.001)	0.128
(Constant)	0.577***	(0.079)		0.542***	(0.072)	
$R^2$ (adjusted)	.066			.088		
F-statistics	1.987**			2.236**		
N		154			164	

Notes: \*  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

degree of Europeanization does not affect agency discretion regarding the selection of either policy instruments or target groups.<sup>10</sup> This finding is corroborated in the control models (not reported), where no significant effect of Europeanization on policy-implementation autonomy can be discerned.

However, the models indicate that some of the control variables have a significant effect on policy-implementation autonomy. Most importantly, in both models, legally autonomous agencies have significantly higher levels of autonomy than semiautonomous agencies. Furthermore, agencies that have “other types of exercising public authority” within their task portfolio report significantly lower levels of autonomy than agencies with other tasks. Moreover, agencies with large budgets have relatively low discretion regarding their choice of target group (though this effect is sensitive to outliers), whereas age has a positive effect on agency discretion. These results are in line with the assumptions proposed in the literature. In contrast, the models do not support theoretical assumptions concerning regulatory and service delivery agencies’ superior discretion in policy implementation.

In terms of country differences, the target group model indicates lower levels of autonomy for Dutch agencies. However, the control models show that cross-national differences are only discernible when controlling for agency structure. Additionally, whereas no country differences can be



found in the full model estimating agency discretion regarding instrument choice, two control models (baseline and culture) indicate significantly higher levels of agency autonomy along this dimension in the Netherlands. In total, the results regarding country differences in terms of policy-implementation autonomy are mixed, and these differences are mediated by structural characteristics. Moreover, the size of the country effect is rather small in all models.

To assess the context hypothesis more thoroughly, we also conducted separate regressions per country. Again, we did not find a significant effect of Europeanization on agency autonomy in any of these models. Thus, the analyses corroborate the differentiation hypothesis (Hypothesis 1), according to which the degree of national agencies' Europeanization has no effect on their policy-implementation autonomy. This finding is robust across national contexts with different trajectories of agency reform and thus also supports the context hypothesis (Hypothesis 2).

### **The Effects of Europeanization on National Agencies' Policy-Development Autonomy**

The previous analyses have shown that the degree of Europeanization has no traceable effect on national agencies' policy-implementation autonomy. This finding corresponds to the differentiation hypothesis, which also assumes a positive relationship among the degree of Europeanization and national agencies' policy-development autonomy. The empirical findings on this relationship are presented in Table 5 (Germany) and Table 6 (the Netherlands). We also report the baseline model and the control models (structure, task, and culture) for this dependent variable. The main finding is that the degree of Europeanization has a significant effect on national agencies' policy-development autonomy, even when controlling for organizational characteristics. Moreover, the effect is observable in both countries.

The models for the subsample of German agencies indicate a robust effect of the degree of Europeanization on policy-development autonomy (Table 5). While the coefficient of the explanatory variable is rather small, it is significantly different from zero in all models, including robustness tests in which potential outliers were excluded from the analysis. Moreover, modest effects are commonplace in this kind of research, which indicates that explanations of perceived agency autonomy have to consider various explanatory factors (Verhoest et al. 2010). The analysis suggests that Europeanization clearly deserves attention as an explanation, particularly when it comes to policy-development autonomy. A closer look at the data reveals modest levels of multicollinearity (well below standard rules of thumb) between the Europeanization variable and legal type, regulation, general public services, and the policy sector dummies.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the Europeanization of national agencies varies across structural and task characteristics, partially elucidating the modest effects

TABLE 5  
Policy-Development Autonomy (Germany)

	Base Model		Structure Model		Task Model		Culture Model		Full Model	
	B	(SE)	$\beta$	B	(SE)	$\beta$	B	(SE)	B	(SE)
Europeanization	0.056**	(0.023)	0.302	0.053**	(0.025)	0.287	0.071**	(0.029)	0.384	0.055**
Legal type				-0.139	(0.348)	-0.063				
Single/group organization				0.092	(0.312)	0.023				
Regulation							0.017	(0.270)	0.009	
Other types of exercising public authority							0.237	(0.261)	0.117	
General public services							0.221	(0.292)	0.113	
Economic policy							0.049	(0.295)	0.025	
Social and welfare policy							0.197	(0.321)	0.090	
Budget							0.170***	(0.050)	0.183	
Age									0.002	(0.005)
Constant	1.907***	(0.317)		1.971***	(0.381)		1.438**	(0.541)	1.861***	(0.379)
R <sup>2</sup> (adjusted)	0.077			0.050			0.049		0.064	
F-statistics	6.048**			2.009	(n.s.)		6.081***		2.977*	
N	63			63			63		63	

Notes: \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

TABLE 6  
Policy-Development Autonomy (the Netherlands)

	Base Model			Structure Model			Task Model			Culture Model			Full Model		
	B	(SE)	$\beta$	B	(SE)	$\beta$	B	(SE)	$\beta$	B	(SE)	$\beta$	B	(SE)	$\beta$
Europeanization	0.058***	(0.017)	0.257	0.056***	(0.018)	0.245	0.044**	(0.022)	0.191	0.058***	(0.017)	0.255	0.043**	(0.022)	0.191
Legal type				0.314	(0.248)	0.073							0.111	(0.290)	0.026
Single/group organization				-0.199	(0.272)	-0.081							-0.148	(0.287)	-0.060
Regulation							0.430*	(0.228)	0.166				0.453*	(0.234)	0.174
Other types of exercising public authority							0.366	(0.278)	0.118				0.380	(0.297)	0.122
General public services							-0.212	(0.255)	-0.087				-0.239	(0.256)	-0.098
Economic policy							-0.102	(0.347)	-0.039				-0.171	(0.338)	-0.066
Social and welfare policy							-0.382	(0.310)	-0.161				-0.350	(0.320)	-0.148
Budget							0.034	(0.817)	0.033				0.035	(0.081)	0.033
Age													0.005	(0.004)	0.186
Constant	2.816***	(0.257)		2.626***	(0.318)		3.114***	(0.326)		0.004	(0.004)	0.130	2.936***	(0.365)	0.516
R <sup>2</sup> (adjusted)	0.057			0.048			0.086			2.719***	(0.255)		0.094		
F-statistics	11.377***			4.862***			2.771**			0.066			2.595***		
N	109			109			109			109			109		

Notes: \*  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

of the explanatory variable. Moreover, this limited overlap among the explanatory variables expounds the modest proportion of explained variance, especially in the full model. More generally, these findings suggest that explanatory factors that could not be included in the statistical models might provide better explanations for policy-development autonomy. However, this article aims at investigating the effects of Europeanization on agency autonomy rather than at maximizing the explained variance in agency autonomy, and the Europeanization variable has the largest standardized coefficient in all models. Furthermore, with the exception of budget size, the degree of Europeanization is the only independent variable with a statistically significant effect on policy-development autonomy.<sup>12</sup>

The results of the Dutch subsample closely resemble the previous findings (Table 6). Again, the analyses indicate a statistically significant effect of Europeanization on national agencies' policy-development autonomy in all models, and these effects also persist when excluding unusual cases. The effect size is rather small, but again the Europeanization variable coefficient has the largest standardized coefficient in all models. The data also display a modest degree of multicollinearity between Europeanization and agency structure (single/group organization), regulatory tasks, and the policy sector dummies.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the analysis reveals varying degrees of Europeanization among the agency population that must be taken into account when drawing inferences from cross-sectional data. In other words, the findings indicate that appropriate control variables have been selected.

In conclusion, all models clearly support the differentiation hypothesis (Hypothesis 1): The degree of Europeanization does not affect national agencies' implementation autonomy, but it has a positive effect on national agencies' policy-development autonomy. The results also support the context hypothesis (Hypothesis 2), which stipulates that these effects (or the lack thereof) are robust across national contexts with different patterns of agencification.

## Discussion

The analysis shows that the differentiated nature of the EU policymaking process has a differentiated impact on the autonomy of national agencies. The article therefore adds important insights to the literature concerning the domestic impact of the EU integration process on relationships within national administrative systems (Bach and Ruffing 2013; Egeberg 2006; Newman 2008; Yesilkagit 2011). Using the classic principal-agent approach, we assumed that national agencies gain expert and negotiation knowledge when becoming involved in European networks. This involvement increases the monitoring and control costs for parent ministries, especially because networks provide agencies with new channels of influence on European policymaking that they can use to bypass their

parent ministry (Egeberg 2006). The national agencies' participation in international policymaking settings thus affects their role in policymaking, arguably making it harder for parent ministries to exclude agencies from policy design. This applies not only to policies originating at the supranational level, but also to domestic policies: Nowadays, there is hardly any policy area in EU member states that is not affected by EU legislation. Moreover, even if national agencies' involvement in EU administrative networks (broadly defined) were the result of deliberate delegation by parent ministries rather than some kind of agency drift, the analysis shows that Europeanization leads to a shift in the relationship between ministries and agencies, or more generally speaking, between politics and administration.

Second, as expected by our theoretical approach, we found no effect of Europeanization on implementation autonomy. As discussed above, parent ministries cannot be bypassed in implementation because binding implementation decisions are made at the national and not the European level. Therefore, additional negotiation and expert knowledge is less valuable for gaining autonomy in implementation. All in all, we suspect that this kind of autonomy is more a function of other types of determinants than is agency participation in international administrative networks. For instance, the statistical models indicate significant effects of agency structure, task, and culture on implementation autonomy. There are other well-known explanatory factors, such as agency leadership and issue dynamics (e.g., sudden crisis), that could not be tested with cross-sectional data at the organizational level (see also Yesilkagit and van Thiel 2008). However, these issues lie beyond the scope of this article, which aims to explain the consequences of agencies' involvement in European networks. Moreover, internationally comparative research indicates that agencies generally have high levels of implementation autonomy, whereas there are clear differences for other dimensions, such as management autonomy (Verhoest et al. 2010). Although national agencies can gain bureaucratic autonomy due to the availability of superior knowledge (e.g., "best practices") in a transnational network (Newman 2008; Yesilkagit 2011), our analysis indicates that under conditions of high discretionary authority, this "network effect" does not lead to further autonomy gains in policy implementation.

Third, the analysis underlines the fact that, as suggested by organizational approaches, structural disaggregation to agencies—be they newly created, modern agencies or long-standing—provides fertile ground for a stronger role of the bureaucracy in policymaking. In the Netherlands, the NPM-inspired agencification was intended to bring about more agency autonomy, especially in terms of policy implementation. However, even though ministry–agency relations in Germany are characterized by strong formal hierarchies, agencies generally have large degrees of discretion in operational matters (Bach 2010). More surprisingly, agency involvement in policy formulation in the Netherlands has been an important element

of administrative reforms (e.g., through feasibility tests), whereas in Germany, agencies do not systematically take part in policy formulation, their involvement being a function of statutory tasks, political salience, and agency leadership, among others (Bach 2012). Thus, our findings indicate that whether policy formulation is considered a core agency activity or not, agency exposure to transnational administrative networks increases their role in policymaking.

Finally, the analysis also adds to the literature on independent regulatory agencies (Gilardi 2002; Maggetti 2007). The empirical results consistently show that regulatory agencies do not report higher levels of policy-implementation autonomy in comparison to agencies with other tasks. Maybe regulatory agencies are not so different from other agencies, after all, when it comes to policy-implementation autonomy. However, the analysis shows that formal structure (i.e., legal type) matters for perceived agency autonomy in policy implementation. The assumption that efficient implementation of regulatory policies requires formal autonomy is often assumed, but rarely tested empirically. Yet the analysis indicates that regulatory agencies may indeed be more strongly involved in policy formulation than are agencies with other tasks, at least in the Netherlands.

## Conclusion

National administrative systems are currently undergoing rapid change under the influence of internationalization. What was once the firm ground of diplomats and foreign affairs departments has now become the core jurisdictions of a growing number of departments that used to be confined to dealing with national policies (Geuijen et al. 2008). At the same time, national administrative systems are themselves under the influence of internationalization trends. This trend has most notably seen the emergence of public management reforms, including the creation of semiautonomous agencies. Together, both developments have led to an evolution of new modes of governance in which the national and international domains have become much more intertwined. The emergence of transgovernmental networks is one important answer to the complexities of governing in an internationalizing world. Internationalization cannot persist without consequences, and this article has revealed that internationalization of policymaking leads to substantial shifts in the relationship between politics and administration within national states. However, these consequences are differentiated, as Europeanization has a much stronger impact on the role of agencies in policymaking than on their role in policy implementation. The increase of autonomy in *policy development* fundamentally changes the role of agencies as they gain policy-development powers that exceed their strict executive authority. They become policy-developing actors that shape national policies without being directly steered by their national political principals.



This article studied the case of the EU, but its outcomes have broader implications. The differentiation between policymaking being transferred to an international level and policy implementation being left at the national level is a common feature of international organizations. Although many decisions made in international organizations lack the effectiveness and enforceability of EU law, agency networks are gaining ground in international organizations, too. The principals of these national agencies must cope with international organizations that gain administrative capacities by means of integrating national agencies into transnational networks.

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### Notes

1. We verified sample representativeness for Germany and the Netherlands using chi-square goodness-of-fit tests that compare the distribution of specific agency characteristics among the population and the sample.
2. The relatively large number of agencies in the Netherlands can be explained by the country's unitary state structure. In Germany, which is federally organized, many tasks are performed at the subnational level (see Bach and Jann 2010 for an overview of the allocation of tasks among the different levels of government).
3. To be sure, whereas the Europeanization index measures specific activities carried out at the European level, the dependent variables measure agencies' perceived autonomy in performing specific activities at the national level.
4. However, there still might be a difference between the perceived and the actual autonomy of the agency. We would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out to us.
5. Because several cases have missing values for either variable, the use of an additive index would reduce the number of valid observations to  $N = 156$ . The internal consistency of the items ( $\alpha = 0.775$ ) indicates that they are closely interrelated.
6. This item has the following answer categories: 1 = not at all; 2 = to a small extent; 3 = partly; 4 = to a large extent; 5 = to a very large extent.
7. This item has the following answer categories: 1 = not at all; 2 = somewhat, but only ex post (e.g., ex post evaluations or feasibility tests); 3 = somewhat, but ex ante (e.g., consultation or ex ante feasibility tests); 4 = frequently, we are invited to participate in policymaking from the beginning; 5 = always, because we often initiate new policymaking ourselves.
8. The dummy variables in the multivariate models indicate whether the organization has any of these specific tasks within its overall portfolio.
9. The policy sector variables are based on the United Nations' “Classification of Functions of Government” (COFOG) (see Verhoest et al. 2010 for more details).
10. The regression diagnostics (autocorrelation, multicollinearity, and distribution of residuals) for these models indicate that all standard assumptions of

linear regression analysis are fulfilled. Furthermore, all models were tested for outliers by comparing these models with those excluding potentially problematic cases. These analyses show that the significant effect of "budget" on agency discretion regarding the choice of target group disappears upon excluding potential outliers.

11. The average variance inflation factor (VIF) ranges between 1.005 (culture model) and 1.526 (full model).
12. The effect of budget size on the dependent variables is not statistically significant from zero when excluding the agency with the largest budget from the sample (full model, task model).
13. The average VIF ranges between 1.000 (culture model) and 1.350 (full model).

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